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World History 116

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**COIL Course Biography: Moses Maimonides**

Moses Maimonides was born on March 30, 1135 in Córdoba, Spain, as Moses Ben Maimon. He was a Jewish philosopher and physician. Maimonides was notorious for his controversial views in Judaism and was recognized for his attributions to the Torah.

Maimonides came from a very wealthy Jewish family. His father, Maimon, was a judge in Córdoba. This position was held in the previous generations of their ancestry line. During Maimonides childhood, he was educated by his father. His education consisted mainly of Judaic studies. He spoke in the Arabic language and wrote in Judeo-Arabic, where Arabic words were written using Hebrew letters (Melvyn Bragg, “Maimonides”).

The Almohads Caliphate, a Moroccan Muslim crusade, conquered Córdoba in 1148. The invasion forced Jewish people in Córdoba to either conform to Islam or be exiled. Maimonides’ family initially chose to hide their faith and appeared to have followed Islamic faith in the eyes of the public. After many years of concealment, they eventually decided to escape and live in Fez, Morocco, where they had a much easier time in disguise (Bokser, Ben Zion, “Moses Maimonides”).

In addition to Greek philosophy and Rabbinic, Maimonides continued to study Judaism. Rabbinic was the belief that Moses received Torah from God and recited to the people. Soon after, he became interested in medicine. Despite the fact that most of these studies required reading and writing, Maimonides ironically disliked poetry. He studied with Rabbi Judah ibn Shoshan in 1165. Rabbi Shoshan was eventually executed for practicing Judaism, prompting the Maimon family to move to Palestine. Afterwards, due to economic matters, the family relocated to Fustat, Egypt (Bokser, Ben Zion, “Moses Maimonides”).

Following the death of his father and his brother, Maimonides worked as a merchant. Then, in order to support his family, he became a physician, basing his knowledge on his medicinal studies. This promoted his interests in philosophy. He questioned reason, meaning, reality and nature (Bokser, Ben Zion, “Moses Maimonides”). Aristotle played major role in Maimonides’ life. Most of Maimonides philosophies were influenced by Aristotle’s ideas of the lifecycle. They both focused on the awareness of “reason” from a physics perspective.

Maimonides literary works were very controversial. He focused on faith, medicine, law, and perspective of creation and death. He began to write at the age of 16 and his major writings were produced from the age 23. He wrote from a rationalist perspective, which included skepticism and realism. At the time, it was an abstract way of thinking about things. He argued that the Talmud, Jewish laws, were not essential to study. He even compiled “The Thirteen Fundamental Principles,” which covered the basics of Judaism and its structure. Then, he focused on establishing the importance in believing in a higher being and His power. Maimonides believed that there should be a fusion of Greek philosophy, Islam, Judaism, and science into one in order to explain the world around them. Thus, his philosophy was to spread science, virtue and morale through religion. This way, he would get more people to listen. However, this made his work very controversial as many criticized him for having such a different perspective. It was not prevalent to mix many religions together, especially with science.

Maimonides died on December 13, 1204 in Fustat, Egypt. He was buried in Tiberius, Israel, where his gravestone was engraved with: “From Moses to Moses, there was none like Moses.” His tomb ultimately became a popular pilgrimage site in Israel.



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